

The Aussie Blueprint for Employability¹

- This article is a snapshot of *career development* and *work integrated learning* in the Australian higher education sector, which is aimed at gearing-up graduates with the skills that demonstrate their employability. Such practices are now recommended by Australian government and are based on self-management theory. They are designed to enhance graduate soft skills in the context of collaboration between academic and work environments. The article concludes with a commentary on Australia's national statement of career development competencies.
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Australian industry and government have been forthright in their demands for 'employable' graduates who can demonstrate certain skills and attributes, and recently recommended work-integrated learning as a way to enhance the development of those qualities (Precision Consultancy, 2007). The notion of graduate employability has been the focus of attention for university management, research, and teaching staff. It has also been addressed by the *Australian Learning and Teaching Council* (ALTC), which has sponsored national projects such as the convergence *career development learning* and *work-integrated learning* (Smith et al., 2009).

Graduate career self-management in Australian skills and employability policy agenda

Career development learning "*represents learning about self and learning about the world of work...[and] the development of the skills necessary to navigate a successful and satisfying life/career*" (McMahon, Patton, & Tatham, 2003, p. 6). Within this scope, career self-management can be conceptualised as a over-arching attribute to be developed throughout the student learning journey (Bridgstock, 2009). As an inherently personal attribute that contributes to the construction of career identity, career self-management has the capacity to influence the meaningfulness of learning experiences constitutive of other graduate skills, such as communication, team work, and ICT skills, which might be experientially developed through work-integrated learning.

¹ McIlveen, P. (2010). The Aussie blueprint for employability. *Graduate Market Trends, Summer*. Retrieved from http://www.hecsu.ac.uk/hecsu.rd/research_reports_the_aussie_blueprint_for_employability.htm

Although they are ostensibly important contributors to employability, there is nothing inherently self-constructive about such skills when removed from their context; being a good team-worker, for example, is just one potential dimension of a self-constructed career identity, but it does not in itself constitute career identity and commitment to a particular career trajectory. A student who is aware of his or her career goals, however, could be expected to make decisions that positively impact upon his or her achievement of those goals, and effectively recruit and exploit resources to facilitate transition into and through the world-of-work. Such a student is in a good position to construe, from his/her unique perspective, the relevance of textbook readings, lectures, tutorials, practicum experiences, and assessment tasks. He or she would have thus contextualised those skills in question.

Although already well established separately as services delivered to students (e.g., career counselling, industry placement coordination) or as part of their degree curricula (e.g., career education classes, final year practicum), the conceptual and pragmatic convergence of career development learning and work-integrated learning presents an enticing avenue for the design and delivery of transformative learning experiences for students: Work-integrated learning can be made meaningful in line with a student's career aspirations, decisions, and actions.

This explicit student-centred meaning-making process contributes to the skills-development focus of work-integrated learning that is designed around the requirements of particular disciplines and professions. Their convergence should therefore enhance students' development of graduate attributes and ultimately contribute to graduate outcomes, particularly employability.

There is evidence of the growing acceptance of career development learning as pedagogical framework for higher education and work-integrated learning in Australia. A recent review of university Career Services by the Australian government found that career development practitioners have focused upon curriculum integration of career development learning and have been working closer with academic staff to embed it in courses (Phillips KPA, 2008). An ALTC study into the convergence of career development learning and work-integrated learning (Smith, et al., 2009) found that a model for career development learning (Watts, 2006) was endorsed by university staff, employers, and students as a useful framework for the design and implementation of work-integrated learning in a way that appealed to students' career interests. Furthermore, the recent launch of a new scholarly journal devoted to the topic of graduate employability, *The Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability*, listed career development learning as a topic of focus within its focus and scope.

Curriculum integration in career self management: A Case Example

The following précis presents some evidence of the convergence of career development learning and work-integrated learning in a final-year, multi-disciplinary undergraduate Business Studies course that was taught in collaboration with the university's Careers Service at the University of Southern Queenslandⁱⁱ. The contribution of the Careers Service was formulated upon the recommendations of

an earlier project that had pilot-tested various career development learning interventions (McIlveen & Pensiero, 2008).

In this course, students had to conceptualise and deliver a project that would serve their self-identified learning needs as well as the operational needs of a local small business. The identification of these respective needs was the subject of initial career development learning tutorials and had to be approved both by academic staff and by participating small business supervisors. The project was then completed within the time frame of the academic semester in which the course was offered; these parameters ensured that the project was sufficiently achievable, yet substantively valuable to the small business (a student of marketing, for example, would prepare a marketing plan for a particular product). There were two items of summative assessment: an interim written report and a written final report that was presented before the class, and to which the business delegates of the concerned organisations were invited.

Prior to formulating their project ideas, students were required to participate in career self-management classes in which they learned about meta-cognitive career decision making theory, employability, graduate attributes, and industry trends, whilst being taught management theory by academic staff; the tutorials also included personality and interest self-assessments. As part of a formative assessment, these activities were delivered to enable students to systematically work through a decision-making process that would enable them to conceptualise a project. Career development learning also included explication of the links between the project and learning goals that had been formulated in terms of the employability skills and attributes each student wanted to develop through the experiential learning of the project's design and implementation in a real work environment. This process required the students to understand their needs in context of their industry's/discipline's trends - specifically in the context of meeting the needs of a local small business. Aligned with the interim report was a self-assessment of progress toward learning goals established in the first phase of the course; site supervisors were also asked to provide a brief progress report. Similarly, upon completing the final report students completed a final self-assessment of their learning goals and wrote a brief reflective statement in terms of career self-management. Finally, worksite supervisors provided an assessment of the student's performance against the project's deliverables, and rated them against employability skills.

A notable point is that this course demonstrated the valuable contribution of career development learning to academic course content and process, rather than its stereotypical contribution at the end of a student's learning journey (i.e., resume, job search, and interview preparation). Outside of the coursework curricula, this approach to career development learning has been implemented with other interventions, including an industry mentoring scheme, in which skills and graduate attributes targeted for development in a relationship between an industry mentor and student protégé.

The Future

The *Australian Blueprint for Career Development* (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2009) sets out eleven career development competencies subsumed under the following broad areas: *personal management* (building and maintain a positive self concept; interacting positively and effectively with others; changing and growing throughout life); *learning and work exploration* (participating in lifelong learning; using career information resources; understanding the nexus of work, society, and economy); and *career building* (sustaining work; making career decisions; balancing work and non-work roles; understanding change in life roles; engaging in career development processes). Learning and work exploration, and career building are surely relevant to employability; however articulation of the competencies of personal management attests to the “lifelong” concept of career within the Australian context. Readers in the UK might recognise some similarity with the USEM framework for employability (Yorke, 2006). Each competency in the *Australian Blueprint for Career Development* is composed of units that are described in terms of four developmental stages spanning childhood to adulthood. The degree of specificity of units and their breadth of coverage virtually establishes the *Blueprint* as a career self-management curriculum in itself; yet, its purpose is to inform the design and delivery of curricula and services in educational and workplace settings, rather than be implemented prescriptively. Given the challenge of pragmatically implementing graduate attributes in higher education curricula (Green, Hammer, & Star, 2009) there is scope to use the *Blueprint* as a framework for developing and assessing career self-management as a graduate attribute (Bridgstock, 2009), and thus advance the utility of career development learning as a way to better engage students in their work-integrated learning.

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